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September, 10. 1991.

REPORT BY JOHN FINK. (fly. HANS FINKE, BERLIN.)

I was born on August, 12. 1920 in Berlin-Germany. My father was a merchant and he was a veteran of WW.1. He owned a store in a suburb of Berlin. My mother died a few months after I was born and my father remarried in 1922 and my sister was born in 1923. Around that time with high inflation in Germany my father lost his business and he became an employee for a department-store. Those were bad times and I remember that we drank milk donated by the 'Quakers' in America. We moved in the 1920th into the inner city and I was for 4 years in an Elementary-school. Around 1928 there was a great depression in Germany. My father lost his job. He went peddling with foodstuff and father & mother did rent out 2 rooms of our 4-room-flat. In 1930 I was enrolled at a Middle-school which I had to leave in 1933 because of the new imposed restrictions by the Nazi-government. I went one more year to a Jewish-Middle-school. In 1933 I was Bar-Mitzwah and I belonged to a Jewish-Youth-club. With Hitler in power and the constant new regulations to hurt the Jews, my father felt it was prudent for me to learn a trade. I became an electrician-apprentice for 4 years, I made 1-2 dollars a week. In 1938 I made my journey-man's exams and with the Nazis in control I did not get the results or certificate. In 1938 we were forced to move into a run down neighborhood where they concentrated the Jews. Every few months, new laws were implemented like wearing a Yellow-Star, ration-cards for less food than the Germans got. We had to deliver our radios, gold & silver-items to the Nazis. Any form of disobedience would get the Gestapo to take you away. They imprisoned, tortured, killed and put people into concentration-camps. Dachau, Buchenwald, Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen were well known for what they did to people there. The 1938-program, they called it 'Kristalnacht' took place and I witnessed the destruction of Jewish-property and synagogues in Berlin. I was fortunate to work for a small Electrical-contractor. It was a small family-enterprise, the owners were not Nazis. Still, I worked, even as a Jew, on construction for Goering's Air-Ministry and I remember I saw once Professor Heinkel, the builder of the famous airplanes.

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This came to an end in 1941. The Gestapo (Nazi-secret-police) concentrated the Jews under Nazi-bosses. We had to work strictly separated from the rest of the workers. I would like to mention here that my former boss, his wife and their daughter survived the war. She was 100 year old last year and we visited them several times after the war in Berlin. I also picked up my Journey-man's -certificate from the Eletro-Union. Life was very hard in the 30th & 40th for us Jews in Berlin. We had a special Identity-card with a big 'J' on it. We had to add the name 'Israel' for a man, 'Sarah' for a woman to our name. Food was short, the work was hard, purchases for many things could not be made by Jews. At night the Allied-planes started bombing-raids. We were forced to go to separate Air-shelters in the basement, supervised by the Nazi, who was in charge of the building. The denunciation by him about anything brought the Gestapo into your home. In 1938 the Polish-Jews were sent to the border with Poland and many did not survive. German-Jews who had relatives abroad and the financial means were able to emigrate. Many went to Shanghai after November 1938. Zionists, many young people made it to Palestine after 1933. The war with Poland started on September, 1st 1939 and the Nazi-daily-papers were reporting the 'Blitz' into Poland. Oh, they were so proud over the 'dive-bombing' of Warsaw. The Germans got their rewards in Dresden & Hamburg in 1945. From 1941-1943 I worked with other Jewish-electricians on the construction of a Machine-fabricating-factory which was and still is on the outskirts of Berlin. At that time people were sent away from the city to the East. The rumor was, they were sent to 'Labor-camps'? and we believed it. The work was hard, the food was insufficient. Some days, I remember, a friend of mine and I went to a friendly farmer and carried each a sack of 100 lbs. Potatoes home. We had to remove our Yellow-star and a stop by a Police-officer could be fatal. We ate horse-meat, if we could get it. In 1943 the Nazis made a great effort to make Berlin 'Judenrein' a present for Hitler's birthday in April. In February 1943, they called it 'Grossaktion' thousands of Jews were collected at a Sammelplatz, synagogues etc. put into sealed box-cars and sent East under guard. Every Berliner saw it and was aware of it. Everyone of us was in constant fear of being arrested. Lists had to be made up by the 'Jewish Community' and people were told when and where to assemble with warm clothing and a few things.

3.

On February 28th 1943 when the Nazis arrested most Jews in Berlin, some went into hiding, many were caught, but some survived the war. I was a patient in the Jewish-hospital and was operated on appendicitis. I heard that my parents were taken away and that my sister went into hiding. On March 8th the Gestapo came to the hospital and took patients, doctors, nurses to the Sammellager, the former 'Home of the Aged' in the Hamburgerstr. which they emptied out earlier by sending the old people on transports to the East. Here we slept on floors, we had to give the Nazis our documents and had to sign papers that we went voluntary to a Labor-camp. Even at that late date we had no knowledge of extermination-camps. On the 12th of March 1943 we were moved by trucks under guard to the railway-station in the Putlitzstr. herded into freight-cars, men women and children, babies and infirm people. The wagon-doors were closed by the Field-police and the train moved East through the night. We were the 36th East-Transport (946) persons. It was only the first of many trips for me by train I had to make as a Nazi-prisoner. By daybreak we passed camps in Silesia where people with Yellow-stars on their clothing moved around and we thought of them as Laborers. The train stopped many times, because of German- military-trains and we came to a final stop in the afternoon. It was very quiet in the wagons. Suddenly the doors were opened by SS-men and men in blue-white pyjamas cried to jump out and leave the luggage in the cars. Very fast, younger men were separated from older ones, women, ~~women~~ & children. We had to move to the end of the railway-platform where SS-Officers with riding-whips decided who should go to one or the other side. We, about 200 men were driven on trucks under guard to a camp with watchtowers, wire-fences and many wooden-barracks. Many of the men who were separated from their wives and children by now realized, that we were not in a 'Labor-camp' but in a Concentration-camp or worse. The beating of us with rubber-hoses begun by the prisoners who were in charge of the camp, mostly German-crminals and Polish-prisoners. We were herded into a cement-building where there were showers and the so called bunker, and we had to strip off our clothes, which we never saw again. They cut our hair, even under the arms and around our privates and washed us with kerosene which was very painful. After a shower they drove us out into the cold night to run to Barrack#2 in 'Monowitz-Buna' a satellite of Auschwitz.

4.

We were told to bunk down, three to a bunk on straw. One can not imagine what everybody thought. Next morning we were given ill fitted prisoner-suits and a number was scratched into our left arm. Later we got numbers on pieces of cloth which we had to sew on our suits. All this was done to the accompaniment of blows with rubberhoses. They succeeded in breaking down many of our fellow-prisoners who committed suicide by running to the fence around the perimeter of the camp which was charged with 380 V. and by the fire of the guns of the guards on the watchtowers. Later, many ran out in the field, when going to work and the SS-guards had their fun shooting them like rabbits. I was very lucky that my wound of the recent operation was not detected and did not break open during weeks and months of hard labor like carrying beams of iron and sacks of cement. It did not take long that we found out from the other prisoners who came earlier where we were and what the camp was all about. Hard labor, little food, beatings, hangings, shootings and after you lost your health to be sent to Birkenau for the gas chamber and crematoria. Our camp-commander was Obersturmfuehrer Schoettl, The Rapportfuehrer was Ober- *Arbeitsdienst* *Fuehrer: Stolz* scharfuehrer Rackers, over them was Sturmbanfuhrer H. Schwarz, a heavy set tyrant. After a few months the order came for prisoners with experience in the trade to report for work with civilians on the construction of a factory-complex for the I.G. Farben Co. I was attached to a small commando # 88. Out of 20 men 2 were electricians, the others tried to be electricians in order to have a better job, which was understandable. Luck, work, health, food determined whether you live or die. At one time I was in the 'Sick-Bay' 9/1-9/14-1943 with Pneumonia. About the life in 'Buna-Monowitz'-the chemist and writer Primo Levi has written a book 'Survival in Auschwitz' which gives a true account about the goings on at 'Buna'. Also Elie Wiesel in his 1st. book 'The Night' had written later about 'Buna' where he arrived with his father in the summer of 1944. In Professor Peter Hayes of Northwestern-University's book 'Industry & Ideology' are a few pages about I.G. Farben's-Buna with pictures on page # 357. I kept myself alive and out of trouble through two very hot summers and two cold winters. Many of the people with whom I came were selected to be shipped to Auschwitz and death. Some days we got to see the flames from the crematoria and smelled the burning flesh. On August 20, 1944 Allied-Air-Forces bombed the I.G. Farben¹ plant for the first time. I hid in the basement of a power-plant. When we heard the sirens for the all-clear and came up, the whole plant was bombed. Still, we and all other prisoners of war, foreign forced laborers,

5.

and civilians kept working and rebuilding till January 1945 when cannon-fire could be heard. The Russian-Army started an offensive in Krakow which was 55 km away. On the 18th January 1945 we were told to take our blanket, we got some bread and set to march to Gleiwitz, a city in Germany. It was cold, icy, snow, windy and it turned into a Death-march during the night. Many SS-guards, after shooting our comrades gave up and were driven away. 9000 inmates of 'Buna' were on the march. 850 ill prisoners remained and were liberated by the Russian-Army, a week later. Next morning we rested at a tile-factory in Nicolai and in the afternoon we reached the city of Gleiwitz. Because we were exhausted and hungry we asked the civilians in the street where the concentration-camp was and we stayed in the overcrowded place a few days with Allied-planes planting magnesium-bombs at night in the sky. After a few days we were taken to a railroad-siding and were tightly loaded into open freight-cars in January, 1945. No water or food. We got only more room in the cars when people died or the Gestapo shot the sick ones on railway-stations in full view of the civilian population in Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, all places where they tried to unload us but those camps in those countries were all overcrowded with evacuated prisoners of the East. On January, 28th my father's birthday, we reached Berlin. I recognized the radio-tower and we were unloaded in the suburb of Sachsenhausen in a hangar of a former aircraft-factory. We were taken to a shower room, wise as we were by now, we thought they would turn the gas on, but to our surprise hot water was poured on us, it felt very good and we came out of the shower alive. I was registered in Sachsenhausen as # 129930-prisoner. After a few days many of us were shipped on February 6th to concentration camp-Flossenbug in the South of Germany. It was a long journey interrupted by bombing of rail lines. There was a stone-quarry and many prisoners got killed. With a wound in my head, caused by a Kapo, I was shipped on the 8th March by train with others to a so called Convalescent-Camp with the name of Bergen-Belsen. With many sick prisoners on this train and a long trip North it was no wonder that many died. The train finally stopped in one night and those who were still alive had to assemble and march to a camp-compound. In the morning we could not believe what we saw. It was March 8th. 1945.

6.

Here was a overcrowded camp,filthy and packed with people in different camps partioned by wire-fences.Men,women and children and some in civilian clothing.Many dead and many died every day.It was my luck that I run intoa Gërman-prisoner whomI had known in Monowitz and who told me that I should get a job with the Electricians and he would see to it. Next morning my name was called out on the Apellground.I had to get deloused and showered which was not much done in this camp and I had to repprt to Block # 1 where the maintenance-men slept on bare wooden bunks,a luxury at Belsen.I had to report to SS-Oberscharfuehrer Steinmetz in the Electro-shop who tested me for my knowledge in the Electro-Trade. From then on,an other Jewish-electrician from Poland and I had to go and do repair & maintenance-work in the different camps and in the SS-quarters and kitchen.Risking our life we stole sausages from the SS-kitchen and brought it in the shop for the other comrades.I was so hungry that I ate the meat from the dog's-plate in the kennel.In the shop we were under supervision of three SS-men who were stationed in Auschwitz before and known there for their cruelty.But they had knowledge of the advancing armees and they became friendly.In April they knew that we were stealing food,they ordered us to share with the other fellows which we did anyway.We also put a radio in good repair. On the 12th April 1945,we heard that President Roosevelt had died but we heard too that the Allied troops advanced and the sky was full of bombers flying North & East.The only food in the last weeks we got was red or white beets and sometimes a water-soup.All of us had to drag the many dead bodies to the crematoria-area.On Friday,April 13th 1945 we noticed that the Kapos & Blockleaders and the German-Army-guards and some SS-troops left the camp.There were still Hungarian and Ukrainian-Cossac-SS who shot people every day.Most of us were sick and weak from loss of weight.Thyphus was all over the camp.Our brains did not work well anymore.When on Sunday the 15th April 1945 British tanks and troops with a loudspeaker-truck announced that we were free,we did not comprehend that after 12 years the 'Third-Reich' came to an end for us. 58000 people were free.As an electrisian,down to to 80lbs,I helped the British-engineers on request to restore power for the camp and saw the camp burned down after everybody was transferred td the Military-camp a short trip away.

7.

10000 unburied dead were found by the British,13000 died after liberation,they could not be saved in spite of the heroic work by the British-Medical-people.

Our SS-guards were apprehended,we saw them as prisoners in our shop they were found guilty at the War-crimes-trial in Luneburg for crimes committed in Auschwitz and hanged.

The liberators of Belsen: 159th Brigade-8th Corps
 1st Commander Colonel Taylor
 63d Anti-Tank-Regiment-British-Army

Chief Medical Officer 2nd British Army
Briegadier Glyn Hughes

With a heavy heart I made this report on September 15th.1991
at the request of the 'Holocaust- Memorial-Foundation of Illinois.
This was my life until 1945, 12 years under the Nazi-Regime.

John Fink
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On the 15th April 1945 came the liberation. I spent 4454 days under the Nazis 761 days in concentration camps as a young man.

After the liberation of Belsen I worked with the army-engineers to restore power in the camp.

Later I worked on the first shows in the tented theater as an electrician under Eva Golberg the entertaining officer. I also started working for the British-Red-Cross as a store & magazine worker. When the B.R.C. turned the supply-depot over to 'UNRRA' (United Nations) I became the manager of the store till June 1947. I was promoted during this time and wore an uniform and had the rank of a lieutenant.

In 1947 in July, I became a member of the 'American-Joint-Distribution-Committee, an American Organization. I was sent to the 'Warburg-Childrens-Home' in Hamburg-Blankenese to administer the estate and was put in charge of the repair and maintenanceprogramm of 3 houses and a large garden area. On June 20. 1948 I married Alice Redlich, a nurse of the 'Jewish-Relief-Unit' (English) out of England in Bergen-Belsen. The Senior Chaplain, B.A.O.R. and Rabbi Helfgott officiated.

From October 1948 until March 1949 I held the position of Director of the 'Warburg-Childrens-Home'. Reuma Schwarz of the J.A.F.P. later Mrs. Weizman (First Lady of Israel) and Betty Adler the Director had left and new children came to Blankenese.

In March, 1949 I moved back to Bergen-Belsen and became Transport-Officer for the A.J.D.C.

My wife and I left for the transit-camp in Bremen on August 22. 1949.

Alice was 8 months pregnant and we arrived in New York by plane Aug. 26./49.

We became American citizens on May 3. 1955.

This is a very short account of my life from 1945 (liberation) up to the arrival in the United-States in 1949.

John Fink
6439 N. Rockwell St.
Chicago, Illinois 60645-5319

John Fink (Hans Finke) born: 08/12/1920. Berlin, Germany.

4 years Elementary School, 1926-1930.

3 years Public Middle School 1930-1933.

1 year Jewish Middle School 1933-1934.

4 years apprenticeship-Electrician and Metal-Trade-School.

1938-1941 worked for an Electrical-Contractor in Berlin, Germany.

1941-1943 Forced Labor for Siemens.

Arrested by the Gestapo on March 8th 1943. Sent to Auschwitz on March 12th with 36th East Transport.

From March 1943-January 1945 in Auschwitz III (Buna)

Forced march to Germany on January 18th 1945.

10 day trainride (open cars) to Sachsenhausen-Concentration-camp, transported from there to Flossenburg and later to Bergen-Belsen.

Liberated by British Troops on April 15th 1945.

4454 days living under the Nazis, 761 days in concentration-camps.

Worked in the British Zone of Germany from 1945-1949 for the British-Red-Cross, UNRRA and A.J.D.C.

Married in Bergen-Belsen to Alice Redlich, a member of the Jewish-Relief-Team 110 from England.

Came to Chicago in Sept. 1949. Worked as an electrician til 1988 and retired, I am a member of I.B.E.W. Local # 134.

4 children, Esther, David, Miriam and Debbie. 6 grandchildren.

